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DEMONOLOGY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

By GEORGE H. GILBERT, PH.D., D.D.,
Dorset, Vt.

THE late Dr. Bruce thought that to the author of the epistle to the Hebrews, as to moderns, "angels were very much a dead theological category." This remark may with equal force be extended to other New Testament writers besides the author of Hebrews, and may with even greater fitness be extended to Jesus himself. Although Dr. Bruce was speaking of a passage which refers to *good* angels, when he made the remark just quoted, we may fitly apply it to the New Testament's attitude toward angels in general, bad angels, or demons, no less than good angels. All together they were to Jesus and to the writers of the New Testament "very much a dead theological category," as compared with their importance in early Jewish theology.

The fact which made angels a necessity to the Jews, viz., the distance of God from men, had no existence in the thought of Jesus. To him God was near, the most distinct and accessible of beings, while angels were regarded as inhabitants of heaven, whose existence and activities do not now concern men in any vital way. In like manner, the place and importance of demons were, in the thought of Jesus, wholly incidental. It is true that he was brought into contact with the subject of demoniac possession somewhat frequently, and that he spoke of demons much oftener than of good angels; true, also, that there are difficulties connected with his references to demons which quite overshadow any difficulties in his references to angels; but nevertheless it is plain that in his thought demons were of small account. There is nowhere in his teaching a suggestion that his disciples have anything to fear from demons, even as there is no suggestion that they have any need of angels. Whatever reality, then, Jesus saw in the popular doctrine of demons, he

simply ignored their influence as related to his disciples; and had not the subject been thrust upon him in a practical form, there is no reason to suppose that he would ever have alluded to it.

This practical form in which the question of demons was presented to Jesus was the phenomenon of demoniac possession, which is found in the synoptic gospels. That it was common appears from the fact that six cases are described in some detail, and that there are three general references to the cure of the demonized.

The most noteworthy fact in the attitude of the demonized toward Jesus, and that which is most significant for our estimate of the phenomenon, is that they are said to have regarded Jesus as the Messiah (Mark 1:24; 3:11; 5:7). Even the recluse on the east side of the lake of Galilee, in a section where Jesus had never been, ran to him from afar, and seems to have addressed him at once as Son of the Most High God. It has generally been thought that the demoniacs regarded Jesus as the Messiah as soon as they saw him, and that this regard was not simply a momentary and crude belief in his messiahship, but was rather a clear and true recognition, though, of course, not accompanied with a practical acceptance of Jesus. This view seems to have some support in the narrative of the Gerasene demoniac, who lived in isolation, and in the statement of Mark that "whenever" the unclean spirits beheld Jesus they fell before him, and cried: "Thou art the Son of God" (Mark 3:11).

Now, if it be a historical fact that whenever demoniacs confronted Jesus they immediately and truly recognized him as the Messiah, apart from anything which they had heard regarding him, it seems psychologically impossible to hold that they were simply insane. We cannot believe that demented people had a clearer and swifter insight into the office and mission of Jesus than his own friends and disciples had. It is, of course, not to be forgotten that the Jews were feverishly expectant of the advent of the Messiah, and one can readily believe that some persons became mentally unbalanced on the subject of his advent. But this hypothesis does not help us if we understand

the narrative to affirm that the demoniacs had an immediate and true recognition of the messiahship of Jesus, for such recognition certainly demands sanity.

But have we a right to assume that the cries of the demoniacs rested upon an immediate and true perception of the mission of Jesus? These afflicted people were allowed to mingle freely with their fellow-men. The first encounter of Jesus with one of their number was in the synagogue of Capernaum. We must then suppose that the demoniacs heard the strange stories which passed swiftly through the land as soon as Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, and which may well have penetrated even to the Gerasene recluse. But if they had heard of the mighty words and works of Jesus, it is more natural to suppose that their salutation of him as Messiah was influenced by what they had heard than to suppose that it was independent of this.

If, now, we admit that the demoniacs had heard of Jesus, and like other men had been deeply moved by what they had heard, and that their cries on seeing Jesus were a result of what they had heard, perhaps in some cases the result of what they had seen with their own eyes, then the view that they were insane persons—insane at least on the subject of the Messiah's advent—becomes more easily tenable. But it must not be forgotten that in order to hold the view of insanity we must deny that the demonized had an immediate and true perception of the messiahship of Jesus. The language of the gospels *allows* this denial, but cannot be said decidedly to favor it.

And this leads to the statement that the writers of the first three gospels, and Jesus himself, seem to have shared the popular view regarding demoniac possession. Thus the synoptists, as a rule, distinguished between demoniac possession and physical disease, or wished so to do. The two are sometimes associated, but never identified. Jesus also is represented as putting demoniac possession in a class by itself, apart from physical disease. Then, too, Jesus treated the demoniacs as though they were really possessed by evil spirits. It cannot be thought that he momentarily accommodated himself to the delusions of the demoniacs in order to heal them, for he spoke of the matter in

the same way when conversing with the Jews, and even when he was apart with his own disciples. Had Jesus known that belief in demons was a mere superstition, it does not seem probable that he would have commissioned his disciples to cast out demons (Mark 6:7).

It seems, therefore, that we must attribute to Jesus and to the first three evangelists a belief in the reality of demoniac possession. If, now, the phenomenon was merely a form of insanity, how does that affect our faith in Jesus? Can we believe in him as the Messiah if it appears that he shared in a popular error? That depends on the error. It certainly should not affect our faith in Jesus as the revealer of God if it could be shown that he accepted the ancient view of the earth. If he had claimed to teach physical geography and had declared that the earth is a flat surface, that would manifestly have affected our confidence in him as a teacher of geography. Again, if Jesus had wished to be taken as a teacher of medicine and psychology, our estimate of his knowledge would be affected if it could be shown that he attributed such an ailment as insanity to the presence of demons. But Jesus came to reveal God and to establish his rule in the hearts of men. He did not claim any special knowledge outside of the religious sphere. If, then, on subjects that lay apart from his messianic work he shared the views of his land and age, that should not in any wise affect our confidence in him as the Messiah. If he is all that he claimed to be, and does all that he claimed to do, our faith has a perfect foundation.

If Jesus had failed to cure the demoniacs, this would have been a vital point. His word would have been discredited. But he did not fail. He invariably healed those who were possessed. By the "finger of God" or the "Spirit of God" he cast out the demon or disease, and in so doing gave a new evidence that he was the one whom God had anointed to set up his kingdom. His authority to heal was the significant thing. But one may say: How could he heal the demoniacs, if his diagnosis of their case was wrong? The reply to this question is that he made no diagnosis, and he did not heal by the use of medical means.

He simply took the demoniacs as that which they were commonly supposed to be, and he restored them by the "finger of God," that is, by divine power. It seems plain then that, while the fact of the cure of the demoniacs is important in its bearing on the messiahship of Jesus, the exact nature of their affliction and Jesus' thought regarding it are incidental. Even if he regarded as demoniacs those who were afflicted with a species of insanity, that in no degree lessens his claim upon us as the Messiah.

It remains to notice one further point before passing from the gospels, and that is the demoniacs' consciousness of sin. In two instances the demonized are apprehensive that Jesus has come to destroy or to torment them (Mark 1:24; 5:7). The narrative seems to attribute this sense of guilt to the demons themselves rather than to those who were possessed. This feature of the narrative is difficult of explanation on either theory of demoniac possession. For, in the first place, it is not easy to see why evil spirits should have volunteered a confession of their fear to Jesus; and, in the second place, assuming that the demoniacs were insane, it is not easy to account for their apprehension that the Messiah would torment them. It certainly was not characteristic of the Jews that they anticipated evil from the Messiah. There were some, like John the Baptist, who expected that the Messiah would institute a judgment at his advent, and would burn the chaff of his threshing-floor; but we are not told that any class was apprehensive of the outcome of the Messiah's judgment. Had there been such a class, we might readily suppose that members of it became insane from terror of the advent of the Messiah, and we could then understand the demoniacs' reference to torment and destruction. It is possible that the Gerasene demoniac thought that by enduring torment at his own hands he would escape torment at the hand of the Messiah. In conclusion on this point we may say that the demoniac apprehension of torment is perhaps as easily explicable on the theory of insanity as on that of the presence of evil spirits in the demonized ones.

We pass now from the synoptic gospels, which are concerned

with the earthly life of Jesus, to the other New Testament writings, which have to do with events more or less distant from the time of Jesus. And, in the first place, it may be noticed, in general, that there is in these other writings very little reference to demons. The term "demonize," so common in the gospels, does not occur here, and even the word "demon," excepting the passage where it is once used in a good sense (Acts 17:18), is found in but three writers, and in them infrequently. The phenomenon of demoniac possession is met once in Jerusalem and once in Samaria, in the time soon after the resurrection (Acts 5:16; 8:7); possibly also in Ephesus many years later (Acts 19:12, 15); and then it disappears from the pages of apostolic history. These last instances, like those of the synoptists, are found among those who looked for the Messiah, that is, Jews and Samaritans. There is no instance of demoniac possession among gentiles, as far as the New Testament informs us.

It is significant that the phenomenon of demoniac possession seems to have disappeared so soon after the resurrection of Jesus, and that it was confined to Jews and Samaritans. Both facts seem to support the view that demoniac possession was insanity on the subject of the Messiah's advent. That would explain why the phenomenon is not met with among the gentiles, and would also explain why it disappeared soon after the work of Jesus was accomplished. For although the Jews as a people did not accept Jesus as their Messiah, he was accepted by large numbers, so that the religious atmosphere was no longer as favorable to the development of extreme forms of the messianic hope, or of extreme nervous results from the anticipation of the Messiah's advent, as it had been before Jesus came.

Our subject is broader than demoniac possession, with which thus far we have been chiefly concerned. But of demons in any relation to men, as of demoniac possession, the writers of the New Testament have relatively little to say. Paul, Peter, and the others were absorbed in greater subjects than the doctrine of angels and demons. It is not unlikely that the rank and file of believers talked more about angels and demons than did the writers of the New Testament. If there was at Colossæ among

those who bore the Christian name a tendency to worship angels (naturally *good* angels), and if Jude was obliged to warn his readers against certain men who went to the opposite extreme and "railed" at angelic dignities, so there may well have been those who attributed little importance to demons and others who attributed much importance to them.

It has already been noticed that the word "demon" is of rare occurrence outside the synoptic gospels. Paul uses it only when warning the Corinthians against idolatry (1 Cor. 10:20, 21) and in the first epistle to Timothy (4:1). In Corinthians he sets demons over against God, and says that one who shares the meat and drink at an idol's feast has fellowship with demons, as one who sits at the Lord's table has fellowship with him. He seems to assume here the reality of demons, and to teach that they are evil. In the letter to Timothy he classes demons with "seducing spirits," and thinks of them as acting through men who speak lies. Their "doctrines" are enunciated by men who have turned aside from the truth. Accordingly, Paul thought of these men as in some sense "possessed" by demons. It is important to notice this point, for it marks off the demonology of Paul in this passage from the phenomenon in the synoptic gospels which is called demoniac possession. In them the presence of demons is not inferred from bad character and teaching, but from the cries of the demoniacs at the sight of Jesus, from foaming at the mouth and gnashing with the teeth; here, in Paul, it is seen in false teaching. That is to say, the sphere of the demon is here the moral and spiritual. Accordingly, it is as easy to think of the gentiles as subject to demons as it is to think of the Jews in that position, while, as we have seen, the phenomenon of demoniac possession is found only among Jews and Samaritans. In another point, however, the synoptic thought of demons is like that of Paul, viz., in this, that they are under Satan (Mark 2:20-27; Eph. 2:2).

James makes a single reference to demons (2:19), which implies that he regarded them as possessing a moral and intellectual nature, and as having a consciousness of guilt. It is not plain that the beings which he had in mind differed from the bad angels of Peter and Jude.

The Apocalypse speaks of men as worshipping demons (9:20), just as Paul speaks of sacrificing to demons; and in the vision of the Sixth Bowl it seems to see the closest relationship between demons and Satan (16:13, 14). Again, the Apocalypse associates demons with desolate regions (18:2), an idea of which we have a reflection in the story of the Gerasene demoniac (Mark 5:10).

In these six passages concerning demons, which have been briefly considered, one does not see any perceptible influence of the Christian revelation, unless indeed it be found in their brevity and simplicity. Their ideas are common to Jewish theology, but in that theology they are associated with many other ideas which do not appear in the New Testament. And what is said of demons may be said of all evil spirits. They have a relatively small place on the pages of the New Testament, the synoptic gospels being excepted; and they are plainly a survival of Judaism, not a distinctively Christian element.

Upon this subject of demoniacal possession in the New Testament the following discussions may prove helpful to the reader: TYLOR, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th ed., art. "Demonology;" CALDWELL, *Contemporary Review*, February, 1876; CONYBEARE, *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 1896-97; WHITE, *History of the Warfare of Science with Religion*, Vol. II, pp. 97-123, 135-67; WHITEHOUSE, Hastings's *Bible Dictionary*, art. "Demon;" MASSIE, Cheyne's *Encyclopædia Biblica*, art. "Demons;" NEVIUS, *Demon Possession and Allied Themes* (1894); NEWBOLD, *New World*, September, 1897, pp. 499-519 (a review of Nevius's work); BARRY, Smith's *Bible Dictionary*, 2d ed., art. "Demoniacs;" BRUCE, *Miraculous Element in the Gospels*, pp. 172-92; TRENCH, *On the Miracles*, chap. 5; WEISS, *Life of Christ*, Book III, chap. 6; EDERSHEIM, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. I, pp. 479-85; Vol. II, Appendix 13.

What one may call the "traditional" view of demoniacal possession, in distinction from the view presented in this paper, can be read (for example) in Trench, who says: "Our Lord everywhere speaks of demoniacs, not as persons merely of disordered intellect, but as subjects and thralls of an alien spiritual might. . . . We find in the demoniac the sense of a bondage in which he does not acquiesce, of his true life absolutely shattered by an alien power which has mastered him wholly and now is cruelly lording over him, and ever further drawing away from Him in whom alone any created intelligence can find rest and peace. . . . It is more than probable that lavish sin, above all indulgence in sensual lusts, superinducing—as it often would—a weakness of the nervous system, wherein is the especial band between body and

soul, may have laid open these unhappy ones to the fearful incursions of the powers of darkness. . . . That whole period [the lifetime of Christ] was 'the hour and power of darkness;' of a darkness which then, as just before the dawn of a new day, was the thickest. The world was again a chaos, and the creative words, 'Let there be light,' though just about to be spoken, were not uttered yet. It was exactly the crisis for such soul-maladies as these, in which the spiritual and bodily should be thus strangely intermingled, and it is nothing wonderful that they should have abounded at that time. . . . The allegiance we owe to Christ as the King of Truth, who came, not to fall in with men's errors, but to deliver men out of their errors, compels us to believe that he would never have used language which would have upheld and confirmed so serious an error in the minds of men as the belief in satanic influences which did not in truth exist."



ST. JOHN AND THE VIRGIN.—*Ploekhorst.*